

Sabers to Satellites: The Corps Maintains Military History...

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Tuesday, 26 June 2007

SABERS to SATELLITES: The Corps Maintains Military History Through the Fort Huachuca Neighborhood Revitalization Project

Standing on the tongue and grooved, plank porch of the Miles House transports visitors to another time and into another way of life. The full-width porch faces west toward the green of the sloping parade grounds where sabers once slapped against tall, black boots and the echo of hooves marked the return of the Sixth Cavalry from the search for renegade Apaches. In the distance to the north, the gray, stone stables and mule barn still stand holding the trap door used for hangings. Just inside the front door, a mounted plaque reveals the home's history. The two-story adobe structure was built in 1884, traditionally used for field officer's quarters, and originally cost \$4500 to construct. The house was named for Lt. Gen. Nelson Miles who commanded the 6th Cavalry at Fort Huachuca. Geronimo surrendered to him there in 1886. In the freshly painted living room, workmen carefully sand and re-varnish the red oak hardwood floors as part of the final touches of the house's restoration in preparation for its next occupants.

Just down the street, angular supports hold up the disintegrating south side of the Wiley House. Out back, Glenn Gangaware, the Adobe Superintendent for Mean Design, directs the on-site manufacture of adobe blocks to rebuild and tie the new construction into the old walls. "We use the same adobe, but increase the density to about 720 p.s.i. and rotate the blocks every fourth course to better tie in and support the structure," Glen explains. "Cracks in the upper walls allowed moisture to deteriorate the adobe near the base causing the wall to begin collapsing." After the walls are repaired, stucco is applied to the exterior to protect the new construction.

Inside the kitchen, John Taylor of the Corp's Tucson Resident Office points out how new wiring is being hidden behind baseboards and door facings. The plaster appears grooved out to accept the new wire, then walls are repaired as necessary before the facings are reinstalled. This way the integrity of the original walls remains, while safer and more efficient electric wiring accommodates today's electronic lifestyle.

Every effort is taken to protect the historical integrity of these homes by restoring rather than discarding any original components. "Many of the windows are still original," Mike Brown notes. "You can tell by the wavy or wrinkled glass and the lead weights." As the Project Engineer for the Fort Huachuca field office, Brown knows this project intimately.

New base housing on Fort Huachuca enveloped a small cluster of older houses situated in a neighborhood called Cavalry Park. These homes, originally used as living quarters for high ranking officers also served as a hospital and a morgue over the last century.

To preserve the integrity of the area, an entire neighborhood including ten of these two-story adobe houses began with Phase One of the Fort Huachuca Neighborhood Revitalization Project in the summer of 2006. Awarded to SunStar L.L.C. of Tucson, this \$8.1 million endeavor included the restoration of 20 units--10 single family adobe houses and 10 duplexes--with a projected time frame of a year and a half for completion. A \$4.9 million contract to SunStar for the second phase of this project begins in July. "The Corps looked for a contractor with expertise in adobe construction," Brian Childers of the Tucson Resident Office said. "And SunStar met the criteria." The structures must be held as closely to original as possible to maintain the historical integrity.

Soon military families residing in Cavalry Park may experience a taste of history by living in this revitalized national historical landmark. Mike Zurcher of SunStar speaks of one of the houses as "being a part of the original camp" built in 1882. He believes this structure is oldest because of its lack of a stone foundation and unusual design. "It may be an old carriage house. We've put that particular unit on hold until we reevaluate its special renovation needs," Zurcher said. "But two of the units are finished and occupied. Five others are ready to turn over soon."

During the past 130 years, Fort Huachuca in southeast Arizona has been a functional military facility. Established in 1877 by the Sixth Cavalry during the Indian Wars, its strategic location just fifteen miles from the Mexican border made the fort an essential outpost even after the Apaches surrendered. The Tenth Cavalry, known as the Buffalo Soldiers, guarded the Mexican border from the fort for about 20 years beginning in 1913.

In the 1970s, the fort housed the U.S. Army Intelligence Center. Currently, the Army Information Systems Command calls Fort Huachuca home, linking the Army intelligence and information communities together around the world.

As part of its mission, the Army Corps of Engineers designs and manages the construction of housing and facilities for the Army and the Air Force. However, the required scope of the Fort Huachuca Neighborhood Revitalization Project embraces an antiquated style of construction which demands an expertise with adobe, knowledge of outdated foundational structures, and a sincere respect for the history held within the melting walls of these historical homes.

Through its work with SunStar and representatives of Fort Huachuca, the Corps revitalizes the Cavalry Park neighborhood into useable living quarters for today's Soldiers while maintaining its historical integrity.